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How children and young people win friends and influence others

Children and young people's association, their opportunities, strategies and obstacles

A report to inform the Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland



**“The danger of the work is that it all becomes about the mechanisms of association.”
(interviewee)**

Dr Tom Cockburn and Dr Frances Cleaver,
School of International Studies, University of
Bradford. September 2008

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About the Carnegie UK Trust Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland

The Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society was established to strengthen civil society. The Inquiry is informed by a Commission, chaired by Geoff Mulgan, and an International Advisory Group.

The objectives of the Inquiry are to:

- Explore the possible threats to and opportunities for the development of a healthy civil society, looking out to 2025;
- Identify how policy and practice can be enhanced to help strengthen civil society;
- Enhance the ability of civil society associations to shape the future.

Drawing on the findings of the Inquiry's futures work, the Inquiry Commission decided to explore the current and possible futures roles of civil society associations in relation to the following themes:

- Growing a civil economy
- Social justice and climate change
- Media ownership, content and social media
- Dialogue and deliberation
- Marginalisation of dissent

This report connects with the work that the Inquiry has conducted to explore the relationships between children, young people and civil society. It therefore complements the findings of the Inquiry's futures workshop conducted for young people aged 16-21, and a project supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation that engaged children in the Inquiry's futures work using the arts. Findings from this work are available on the Inquiry website.

The final report of the Inquiry Commission will be published in early 2010.

For further information about the Inquiry and to download related reports go to:

www.futuresforcivilsociety.org

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Abstract

How do young people associate? What is the effect of association on young people's well-being?

The research found the vibrancy of young people's association, which included a wide spectrum of relationships ranging from close friendships to formal participation in public decision-making fora.

The outcomes of association can be tracked by looking at various dimensions of well-being; these include the effective exercise of voice, social inclusion, emotional and physical/economic well-being. However, inequitable societal structures play a crucial part in shaping the processes of association and their outcomes. In effect, such inequalities are reproduced in these associations and perpetuated in their outcomes.

This report explores how young people associate, formally and informally, and what the effect of this association has on their well-being. The research finds that existing social inequalities shape both the processes of association and engagement, and the outcomes. Even the most resourceful young people struggle to engage as a result of barriers and obstacles being too high.

Background

This research was commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust to inform the Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland. Through the Carnegie Young People Initiative (CYPI), the Carnegie UK Trust has been working with young people for over a decade. Given the focus of CYPI was to increase the influence children and young people have over decisions that affect them, it was imperative for the Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society to actively explore the relationship between young people and civil society.

This report is one of three strands of the Inquiry's work that have addressed the relationship between young people and civil society.

The final report of the Inquiry Commission will be published in early 2010.

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1 Introduction

Background to the report

There has been a dramatic intensification of interest in children and young people's well-being in the last ten years, but the positive outcomes of this are debatable. A number of important initiatives have shaped policy in the UK (see Table 1 in Appendix). Most of these aim to extend rights or services to children and young people. However, recent commentary also suggests the poor comparative record of the UK in securing children's well-being, the lack of systematic monitoring of well-being and the magnitude of the changes in society needed to better this position (UNICEF 2007, UK Children's Commissioners, 2008). Whilst a substantial amount of attention has focussed on economic and health status, education and childcare, there is less evidence available on the role that life skills, social skills and participation in decision-making, volunteering and community service play in children's and young people's well-being (Bradshaw and Mayhew, 2005). This report aims to outline some of the links between these different elements of well-being in order to create a lens through which to examine the associational lives of children and young people.

Academic literature links the subject of children's association to a range of inter-related issues. There is an increasing interest in the UK in issues of 'active citizenship'. While the interest in young people's citizenship is an important plank of government policy, as exemplified in the *Every Child Matters* and *Youth Matters* agendas, it is also a central concern of research and policy in the voluntary sector. This has involved contributions from organisations such as Changemakers, Community Action Network, Youthbank and the Carnegie UK Trust, amongst many others. Useful research has been undertaken in this area by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2007) and a plethora of other academic studies. The turn towards active citizenship is both informed and tempered by ideas about the extent to which young people trust decision-makers and politicians. One study found that those under 25 had the lowest levels of trust of those around them and of police and politicians than any other age group (Pattie et al, 2004).

Other notable lines of enquiry have explored how adults working with children can help them in community decision-making (Save the Children, 2005); the development of standards to ensure consistent high quality of participation (Save the Children, 2005); the use of information and communication technologies in connecting young people with democratic processes (Howland and Bethel, 2002; Cockburn, 2005); and how to evaluate and research into children and young people's participation and decision-making (Kirby and Bryson, 2002).

Interest in the inclusion of children and young people in society is also addressed at international level, notably by the UN. Additionally, the European Commission published its *White Paper on Governance* and the path towards promoting active citizenship of young people by implementing the European Youth Pact (European Commission, 2005). A European policy review (Mockre and Puntsher Reikman, 2006) argued that new forms of governance are necessary to improve decision-making in organisations. Such governance includes stakeholders (consisting of various networks of public and private agents). These new networks need to link to decision-making mechanisms that are to replace existing 'top-down' politics. The review concludes by highlighting the importance of developing young people's identity around democracy and inclusion and the potential dangers of some forms of democracy to exclude people. There is general recognition of the need to make deliberate efforts to overcome exclusion from decision-making. More recently, the representatives of the governments of the Member States adopted council conclusions for an "approach to youth policy with a view to enabling young people to fulfil their potential and participate actively in society" (Council of Europe, 2007). The Commission invited member states to "further implement the structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations ensuring that young people with fewer opportunities and those that are not members of an organisation are included in the structured dialogue". Although the Council of Europe conclusions are not legally binding on EU members, they are viewed as the common opinion of governments.

Whilst public involvement as an active citizen may be important in terms of making a positive contribution to society, such participation is no magic bullet for achieving well-being. A number of trends and policies may adversely affect children's associational life and well-being. For many children in Britain, life chances continue to be restricted by poverty and identity-based discrimination. Numerous education acts restrict the curriculum and add to the stress experienced by children at school. The youth justice legislation (at least ten major bills in the last ten years) links children and young people with trouble and misbehaviour, and further restricts their opportunities (for example, to play or meet in public places). Critics point to poor treatment of children in England – they are deemed criminally responsible at the age of 10, may be locked up in institutions and are subject to state action with reduced access to legal process (NSPCC, 2005). There are also legal restrictions on the role of children and young people on boards of charities and private companies and what they can do to participate in society.

In short, there is ambiguity here. Different models of engaging with children include courting them as active citizens (whose voices are 'listened to' and whose rights and welfare are paramount), educating and instructing them as passive beings and controlling and disciplining them as potentially anti-social.

This report teases out some of these overlapping and contradictory approaches to children's association and well-being. It also looks at non-formal association (affecting all children) as well as formal participation in public fora (involving the few). In doing so, it is hoped that some of the gaps in understandings of the links between association, well-being and a healthy society will be addressed.

A number of concepts have been drawn on to inform the way of thinking about children and young people's association.

Association

This report emphasises that there is a spectrum of association ranging through private and public life, and that different forms of association are likely to have both 'light' and 'dark' sides. Whilst interested in the patterns of formal associational life, we are keen to highlight the 'missing' associational activity that makes up the bulk of civil society interactions for most children and young people.

Well-being

The concept of well-being provides a promising framework for thinking about children's association and civil society because it links the provision of basic needs with social relatedness, the exercise of meaningful agency and attainment of enhanced quality of life:

"Well-being is a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals and where one enjoys a satisfactory quality of life." (WEDC, 2008)

Arguments for well-being suggest that the concept (embracing material, relational and psychological well-being) allows for a focus on the attainment of positive states (well-being, social inclusion) rather than solely on the amelioration of negative states (poverty/exclusion). It allows for the study of both states of being and processes of association. Here, the concept of social capital is used to categorise these. Well-being outcomes are generated through conscious and sub-conscious participation in social, economic and political processes. Well-being is more than the 'good life', it is about having meaning in life and it implies both a focus on the local politics of everyday life and on the operation of wider systems of society and governance. As McGregor (2007) argues:

"Well-being is functioning meaningfully and feeling well within a specific context. On the other hand it is having resources, capabilities and opportunities to achieve goals which go beyond those that present themselves in local contexts."

Social capital

The generation of social capital through association has come to be seen as a way of addressing many of the challenges of contemporary society. Mainstream social capital theorists argue that high levels of association generate trust and social cohesion and enhance political engagement and economic activity (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2000). Such capital is seen as a societal resource which links people with the state and provides the essential 'glue' of cooperation. Ideas about the potential for social capital have informed policy in both developed and developing countries. As Edwards et al (2003, pp2-3) note:

"Repairing and enhancing social capital is seen as the way forward in dealing with difficult current social issues, including the consequences of globalisation and individualisation; the fragmentation and diversification of family forms and society; declining and alienated communities and neighbourhoods, and forms of social exclusion; and decreasing political engagement."

The concept and application of social capital have been critiqued for overlooking the 'dark side' of bonding and association, and for tending to depoliticise the concept to avoid addressing gross structural inequalities (Edwards et al, 2005). However, we have drawn on the concept because it usefully frames an analysis of the content and practices of association, the meaning people attach to interaction and ways association perpetuates or overcomes inequalities (Bourdieu, 1977). We use it to focus on the 'unseen' as well as the 'seen' manifestations of interaction (Wong, 2007), to look beyond the formal institutions of democratic and economic life to different forms of sociability and informal networks (Edwards et al, 2003).

The concept of social capital proves useful in understanding the spectrum of children's association. Borrowing social capital terminology, we distinguish between bonding forms of association (those between families, close neighbours, children of similar identities), bridging association ('horizontal' links between children of different identities) and linking association ('vertical' relationships between children and powerful adults, such as service providers or politicians). Such forms of association may have both a light and a dark side. For example, as Henderson et al (2007, p45) state:

"We have seen in our case studies that in many instances the bonding type of social capital that binds a young person to their community or family, can limit their possibilities for pursuing the individualised route to social mobility, and that they need to get out of such communities to get on."

Virginia Morrow (1999) encourages us to reinterpret the way social capital is applied to children. She argues:

"In much existing work on social capital, children and young people are constructed as the passive recipients of culture, their agency is denied and there is no acknowledgement of how children actively generate, draw upon, or negotiate their own 'social capital' or even provide active support for parents."

Research found that formal civil society associations were problematic for most young people. Even 'super-participants' required support when entering formal, adult-initiated fora. Such difficulties suggest a need to understand where children and young people feel active, comfortable and purposeful in association and how they learn the skills to navigate both private and public life.

2 Conceptual framework and methodology

Conceptual framework: resources, mechanisms and outcomes of association

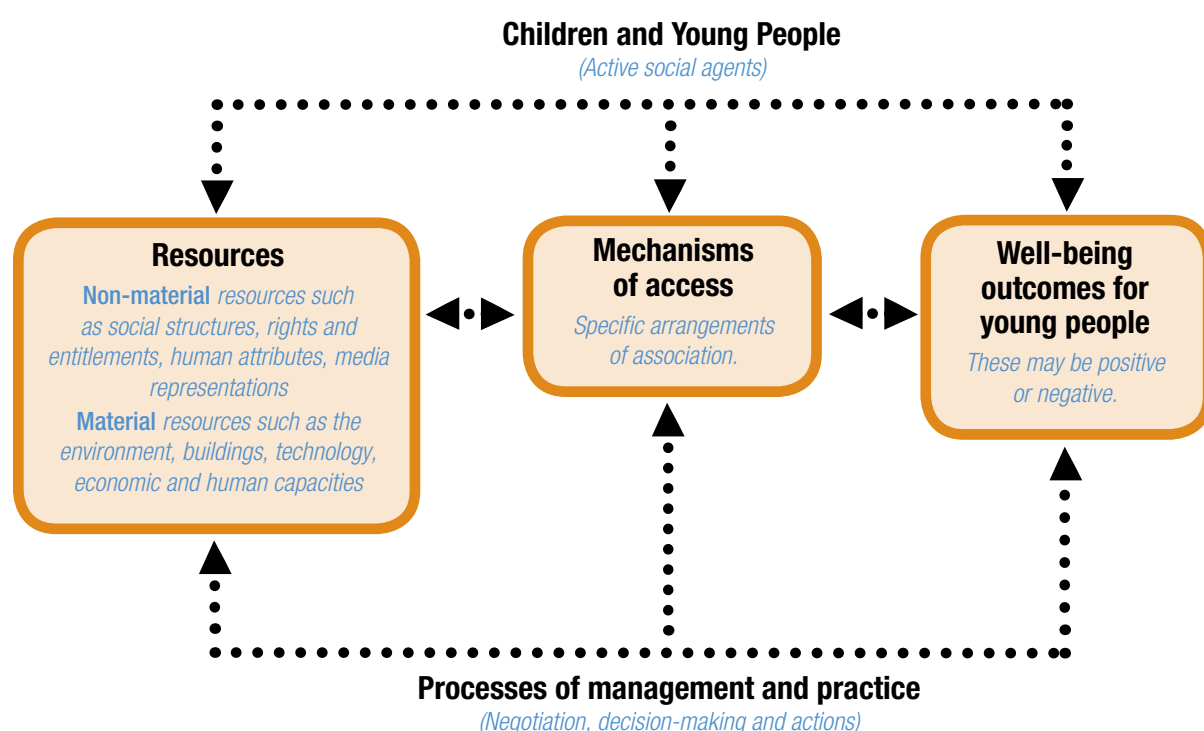
The idea of children's association and civil society explored here has been shaped by a conceptual framework which draws on critical realist thinking and synthesises concepts of well-being, association and social capital. This framework places both mechanisms and processes of association in the context of patterns of societal resources and indicates the possibility of variable outcomes of association.

The brief review of history below shows a huge growth in the legal and technical apparatus created to institutionalise formal civil society associations into a dialogue with government. However, these continue to exclude the poorer and more marginalised young people, even though the 'voices' of all children, including the most vulnerable, have been sought. Response to such exclusion has often been through the design of better rules and decision-making arrangements that will encourage participation. However, it is argued that such mechanisms of association form only one small element of participation in society.

Such mechanisms might include channels for democratic engagement such as youth parliaments, projects to involve children as partners, events and services aimed at representing or advocating for children. They also include relationships with families and friends, and informal activities such as sport and socialising.

However, such mechanisms cannot be understood without a) understanding the context in which they operate and the resources and societal drivers which shape them and b) a rigorous and differentiated scrutiny of their effects over time. The framework set out below is proposed to aid understanding of these.

In this framework, particular mechanisms of association are shaped by the structures and resources of society which include material resources – such as the environment, buildings, technology and children and young people's access to these resources – and non-material resources, such as societal structures and institutions (marriage, the family, gender roles), rights and entitlements and young people's access to the media. This is a two-way relationship as mechanisms also shape the ways in which children access and interact with the resources of wider society.



Specific mechanisms of association produce different outcomes for young people according to their circumstances. These may be positive or negative, and relate to interlinked aspects of physical, social and psychological well-being. Outcomes could be broadly conceptualised as relating to political voice, access to services, livelihoods and economic activity, social inclusion and feeling good. The outcomes also shape the ongoing ways in which children associate; positive and tangible outcomes may strengthen young people's willingness to participate and sufficiently empower them to extend the reach of their associational activities. Conversely, negative outcomes and thwarted expectations can invalidate particular mechanisms of association and limit children's future participation.

Methodology: entering children's worlds

In order to extensively map patterns in association and to intensively understand meanings and particular local processes of association, a mixed-methods approach was adopted in this research. This combined a number of standard techniques, including an extensive literature review; ten formal and informal interviews with key informants (academics, activists, practitioners and policy-makers); and four case studies of children's association that included informal interviews, focus groups, observations and participatory exercises. Of the interviews with key informants, two were conducted over the telephone with verbatim notes taken. The others were carried out face to face either in their places of work or in the University of Bradford. All these interviews and the focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed.

For logistical reasons, the research primarily focused on the English context and experience. Undertaking Bradford-based case studies enabled us to capture the delicate social ecology of particular neighbourhoods. The primary data collection was undertaken in the Bradford district which has the third largest population of under 16s in the UK outside London, of whom 34% are from minority ethnic backgrounds (City of Bradford MDC, 2007).

The case studies included a series of participatory observational visits to a social housing estate in Bradford; a focus group with four young women in a project for young mothers; a focus group with ten members of the Bradford and Keighley Youth Parliament (BKYP); observations of a group for children of refugee and asylum-seeker families and a participatory exercise with five of the children. The case studies were reinforced by follow-up interviews or informal discussions with key informants to achieve some dialogue between children's and key informants' perspectives.

The Wyke/Buttershaw area was chosen because it is predominantly white, but has a large number of people with no formal qualifications, high levels of youth unemployment and low levels of economic activity (City of Bradford MDC, 2003). It was found that Delph Hill is a housing estate that is negatively perceived by surrounding residents. The young people here were seen by local practitioners as being particularly "hard to reach and disengaged from any local youth activities". A focus group was also conducted with four young mothers who visited a morning group held at a local school.

The Bradford and Keighley Youth Parliament is facilitated by Bradford Metropolitan District Council Youth Service. It is comprised of elected youth representatives from constituencies across the district. The focus group of elected members was facilitated by youth workers. Most of the youth members could be classed as 'super-participants', and most were Bradford-born Asian young people.

The asylum-seeker and refugee children were engaged in the research through the voluntary organisation Bradford Action for Refugees (BAFR). The focus for data collection was the weekly Welcome Group run by BAFR, located in a community centre in inner-city Bradford where many of the children are housed. The children were aged from three to 12, some had no memory of living anywhere else, others had been in Britain for less than a year.

3 Well-being outcomes

This chapter considers the concept of well-being as a way of understanding the (desirable) outcomes of association and also as a means of tracking processes of association.

Trends and indicators of well-being

There are no simple relationships here – whilst some indicators of children's well-being in society are improving (overall wealth, survival, school attainment), areas of serious concern remain (the numbers of children still living in poverty, restrictions on their use of public space, increased exclusion from school). Studies track and analyse these trends in different ways, with Bradshaw and Mayhew (2005) enumerating 12 domains of children's well-being: demography, child poverty, health, lifestyle, mental health, children's time and space, child maltreatment, children in and leaving care, childcare, children and crime, education and housing. Significantly, they distinguish between well-being (how children are doing now) and well-becoming (how they will do in adulthood). The societal trade-offs inherent to achievement of well-being become obvious here. For example, the preparation for adulthood (through education) may well be in conflict with a young person's current well-being (the need to play or have more free time).

In this research, we draw on how different forms of social capital generate different outcomes of children's association as they relate to political voice, access to services and amenities, livelihoods and economic activity, social inclusion and feeling good. Positive experience of association may well generate the habits and confidence of political engagement, as well illustrated by the super-participants of the Bradford and Keighley Youth Parliament. Here, we outline some linkages between association and well-being outcomes.

Well-being, wealth and poverty

Whilst the focus of some thinking about well-being is on the kind of economic development we think desirable (NEF, 2004), well-being is clearly not only about wealth creation. At a national economic level, there is a clear well-being threshold – a point where increasing gross domestic product (GDP) and well-being start to diverge. A UNICEF report on child well-being in rich countries found no clear correlation between GDP and Child Poverty Ranking. Indeed, the UK and US were ranked in the bottom third for five out of six of the dimensions of well-being studied (the dimensions being material, health and safety, education, family and peer relationships, behaviour and risks, and subjective well-being). Significantly for this research, the study found the UK at the bottom of the tables for family and peer relationships and for children's subjective ranking of their own well-being (UNICEF, 2007).

However, poverty and social class do mark out the parameters of children's association and thus shape their chances of attaining well-being.

Association and well-being

Poverty stunts associational life, social capital and well-being. Evidence from international development illustrates the multiple and interlocking ways in which the threadbare social networks of poor people and their 'poverty of representation' interact with physical and material disadvantage to reproduce poor well-being outcomes over generations (Cleaver, 2004). A study of families and neighbourhoods in the UK (James and Grimson, 2007) shows how deeply socio-economic inequality undermines children's life chances; poorer families in the study were less likely than others to feel that their neighbours would help them out, less likely to see their local neighbourhood as offering adequate opportunities for their families. Such families themselves had very low levels of civic association, compared to those in economically better-off neighbourhoods.

The links, however, between social inclusion and attaining well-being are complicated. A New Economics Foundation (NEF) study for the UK, for instance, found that whilst social isolation is usually accompanied by a low sense of well-being, there is no necessary correlation between 'pro-social' behaviour and sense

of personal well-being. Personal well-being and high self-esteem can be linked to very prejudicial attitudes towards others, particularly those of different identities. The experience of the Schools Linking Project, Bradford, shows how children need help in overcoming social divisions – in creating ‘bridging’ social capital through facilitated friendships with children not like them (Raw, 2005).

Studies also suggest how both experiences at school and adults’ involvement in association impact upon children’s association and well-being. The New Economics Foundation (2004) reports children’s sense of well-being declining from primary to secondary school, whilst James and Grimson (2007) suggest that schools can provide a strong focus for the association of parents, though this declines after primary school. Bradford’s Schools Linking Project shows how school can provide a framework for wider association, and also illustrates how children’s general (sometimes prejudicial) attitudes do not necessarily predict their particular actions when actual association is facilitated. The study quotes one child on the impacts of the scheme: “I didn’t think we’d get along, because we’re Asian and they’re English. But we did. My buddy and I have the same thoughts!”

Association shapes well-being outcomes in unexpected ways. The UNICEF report shows an increase in ‘risky’ health behaviour (smoking, drinking, unprotected sex) among children in Northern Europe and links this to larger quantities of time these children spend with their peers as opposed to their families. Further, a World Health Organization (WHO) study on young people’s health explicitly links well-being and social relations to risky health behaviour in children in Europe – Britain scores particularly badly on health-risk behaviour among young people (WHO, 2004). This study notes the links between gender-differentiated ways of associating and health outcomes, and links positive experience of school to a greater sense of well-being and less risky behaviour. It notes the continuing need for children aged 15 and over for adult support, and yet their increased difficulty in communicating with significant adults. It also acknowledges the positive value of peer groups to children. The tension between the individual need for autonomy and recognition of their interdependence is a recurring theme in well-being studies (Devine et al, 2006).

Space, play and attachment to place

Investigations into what children want emphasise the desire for more spaces to play (NCB, 2006) and ‘informal’ space for older children (Elesley, 2004), both safe and free of adult supervision. There are strong perceived links between spaces to play, association and ‘feeling good’, for example, through the development of child friendly ‘formal’ built environments (NCB, 2006a). NEF (2004) notes the importance of the development of curiosity and creativity and also of friendship/peer groups as social activities begin to move outside the home when children become teenagers. However, this is balanced against parent’s perceptions (particularly in poor areas) that teenagers hanging out on the streets is strongly associated with crime and anti-social behaviour and that tackling this would be the best thing to improve their neighbourhoods (James and Grimson, 2007). There is, therefore, a perceived need to negotiate children’s safety in open spaces – such negotiations include those at adult/child level and at a societal level (Valentine, 1996).

Attachment to place, to a locality, with particular social networks may be seen as positive in supporting a sense of identity, responsibility and relatedness. In this sense, association linked to place may generate social inclusion as an outcome. However such attachment may also be restrictive of young people’s aspirations and opportunities:

“Patterns of behaviours and of social opportunity, that confine people to their immediate neighbourhoods may also restrict their vision, and sense of community spirit.” (Matthews, 2003)

A Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) study shows how place shapes outlook; for young people in deprived areas, attachment to place, family and friends can provide them with social support and encouragement but also can act as a “brake” on their seeking out or taking up opportunities outside the locality (JRF, 2007). Another JRF study found that children from poorer areas spent more time on “street play” (Sutton, 2007), unaccompanied by adults on the streets and in open spaces. By contrast, children attending a private school participated in more (costly) clubs and organised activities and spent time at friends’ houses. In this study, asylum-seeker and refugee children were often not allowed to play outside because of their parent’s

fears about the areas in which they were housed, so restricting their association to school and refugee support group activity. Strong association with localities also leads to territorialism, as noted by the young people in Delph Hill, who identified localities with the operation of violent gangs. This is reflected in other studies, for instance, Henderson et al (2007, p71) note in their study of youth transitions in four contrasting neighbourhoods:

"Violence seems more likely in localities where individuals have a strong investment in place. It is less likely in areas that are more individualised and where space is not contested, such as our rural area and the affluent commuter site. In two other research sites ... the use of space and place was central to young people's biographies, and there was a pervasive 'culture of violence'."

Voice and processes of association

We see the ability to exercise 'voice' as both integral to the processes and mechanisms of association, and a key well-being outcome. The subject of voice permeates our conceptual framework; the structures and resources of society pattern the way in which certain voices are heard, others suppressed or muted (for example, in the media); formal and informal mechanisms of association require children and young people to give voice in different ways; being heard and influencing decision-making through the exercise of political voice is a key element of well-being.

Although this section is devoted to a consideration of voice, it also cautions against always seeing voice as the primary means of expression and association. Association, relatedness and well-being outcomes may also be achieved through actions and daily practices; refugee children in this study frequently mentioned how they quickly made school friends with those British children who first showed them the toilets, where to eat lunch, what games to play. We are strongly aware that the exercise (or non-exercise) of voice can be as marginalising for some as it is empowering for others.

There are a number of interlinked processes at work in children's association and their exercise of voice. Children and young people have a strongly-held need to express themselves as individuals – to articulate what it is to be a young person with a particular social identity – most likely to other young people. Examples include activities with close friends and peers such as making music, engaging in chat rooms or just talking, chilling out and hanging around. The sense of belonging with people of similar voice is important here and a sharing of belonging with those similar circumstances.

Given the centrality of the need for expression to children and young people, it is concerning the research found that most children referred to a struggle to be heard as young people. That is, to have their issues and agendas acknowledged beyond their peers, especially by the powerful. This struggle may take place through 'democratic' structures of association or through less sociable forms of association and action. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies has long made the association of working class gangs and subcultures with a sense of struggle within capitalism (Hall et al, 1989).

Finally (but not necessarily sequentially), there is a process of dialogue facilitated through association. Children and young people in the Youth Parliament emphasised that they have to learn that the skills of representing the views of other young people and learning to interact productively with powerful adults does not come easily. Significantly, young people are well aware that accents and the way that they exercise voice can be an obstacle to being heard.

Expression

The voices of children and young people that were heard during the research constantly emphasised the need for self-expression; one young woman talking of her music-making said: “It’s all about expression I guess”. It was in the more informal contexts of association that children and young people felt the most comfortable with expressing themselves and claiming a particular identity. Frequently mentioned were talking to friends, making music with people of similar identities and, for the refugee children, contact with others speaking the same language. One of the BKYP members enjoyed the informality of the projects he was involved with:

“There are no rules and regulations as well, well there are, but they are more lenient. Plus, you can’t get sacked!”

Thus, there was a comfort for the young people in talking and acting in more informal circumstances. This gave them the freedom to express what they wanted.

In contrast, in the more formal contexts, young people thought they were less likely to express themselves to their full extent. Indeed, even the most articulate and older young people required support by adults in expressing themselves. Those mostly excluded and not provided with support thus find it virtually impossible to express themselves in such settings. For youngsters excluded from school and other ‘public’ sites of engagement, problems of expression were acute. The practitioners we spoke to thought that work with such young people must begin with the elementary ways in which they can learn to communicate and express themselves within association; these may be as basic as personal hygiene, taking turns in conversation and linguistic skills.

Effective expression in the context of more formal organisations, including voluntary organisations, involves a strong degree of skills. How are these best delivered? Schools, of course, have their place, as one young man noted: they are there every day of the week. However, our interviewees noted the limited nature of channels of expression in schools. The young people in BKYP, on the other hand, noted the importance of learning out of school to reduce the effects of social exclusion. A young woman commented on the freedom of being able to express herself in this context:

“I think it has made a lot of people more independent, much more confident, and not at all like school. School is, like, very closed, and you are just limited in what you are going to do. When you come here, you are in a different environment, you are much more yourself, and you are independent and you are accepted as well. No-one is going to say anything against you.”

For refugee children, voice was an essential part of making friends, of new identities and of belonging. For example, the youth worker recalled children expressing a desire to learn Punjabi (the language of play amongst their peers) in preference to maintaining their mother tongue, which marked them out as ‘different’.

Struggle to be heard

A feeling that they have been ignored or gone unheard can have damaging effects on children and young people’s future association and representational processes are fundamental to the struggle to be heard. All the adults we interviewed and all the young people we worked with were aware of children and young people being misrepresented, not listened to, or having less access to channels of expression than adults.

There is a huge academic literature (National Youth Agency, 2005a) on the representation of children. The issues dealt with include:

- the representation of children and young people in a patronising or tokenistic way;
- a stress on children as vulnerable, incompetent and in need of protection;
- a stress on children and young people as dangerous, untrustworthy and threatening;

All these representations were mediated through gender, race, social class, (dis)ability, and so on and there has also been much discussion of whether 'advocacy' by others works better for some young people than direct representation.

The young people in the Youth Parliament found representing the voice of others difficult:

"There have been times in BKYP when I have had to voice other people's opinions which I don't necessarily agree with, but I have had to do it."

Children and young people's voice is beginning to be included in a number of public contexts, but the way those voices are represented is a crucial part of the process and this can be done in either tokenistic or empowering ways.

Giving voice does not always result in being heard and getting results. As one member of the BYKP put it:

"If you are going to talk about having a voice, we need to live in a society where it's about politics and democracy and our voice, then let's have some listening and let's have some action!"

Common to other participatory processes, the expression of voice and the feeling of being heard create expectations of positive action by more powerful adults to address issues raised. Managing expectations is critical to ensuring that the expression of voice and the struggle to be heard does not result in disillusionment and frustration. There is a delicate balance to be achieved by adult facilitators between opening up debate and boundary-setting. Staff supporting the BKYP endeavour to channel young people's exercise of voice to issues that can actually be dealt with.

The potentially political nature of the struggle to be heard presents numerous challenges to those trying to create opportunities for young people to exercise voice. One of our key informants noted that there are practical difficulties about facilitating the discussion of political issues in schools, including a concern with accusations of 'political bias' and possible backlash from disapproving parents. Even within the Youth Service, there was concern over the type of association that young people might be involved in; the degree to which young people could translate their voice into action was circumscribed by adults' concepts of appropriateness. A youth worker cited the example of a member of the BKYP asking an official whether they could hire a bus to participate in an anti-war demonstration in London:

"Of course, the official froze and half-heartedly laughed, but at that point for me the betrayal of participation in the public debate we are seeing is that we are ultimately in a situation where we are talking about what you can participate in on my terms. It is not about being able to actively participate as citizens, including the right to dissent and protest."

The young people were not allowed to hire the bus with public funds, but instead organised an anti-war demonstration in Bradford.

Given the difficulties of formal contexts such as 'councils' or meetings and the difficulties associated with schools, experiments with less formal contexts for the exercise of voice may offer promise. These often are based on initially creating forms of self-expression, but also on building up the ability to engage with societal debate; the struggle to be heard. For example, in Bradford, the Lyrics Lounge exists to facilitate the production of music by young people and to steer negative energy (traditionally associated with hip hop and rap music) into discussing local issues and portraying positive messages. One of the workers claims:

"The project's doing something spectacular in allowing people to channel their opinions, feelings and vent anything, be it negative or celebratory positive matters, in a constructive way."

One young person interviewed says that such self-expression through writing lyrics for songs is not easy, but that it links individual expression with political action:

"It's a bit of a challenge to put pen to paper and to write about how I feel. It's a positive way to express what your beliefs are – that's what has got me involved in what I am doing at the moment."

Another young woman speaks of the self-expression through lyrics and music as "a platform for you to start altering and perfecting – no, not perfecting as such- I mean bettering yourself." Such projects may go further

and explicitly build on processes of dialogue to create social 'bridging' and 'linking' capital. Associated projects include those aimed at helping young people to challenge cultural stereotypes and cross boundaries, for example through regular video conferencing with young people in Pakistan or through a film project to document the lives and experiences of migration of young people and/or their parents from East European and South Asian backgrounds (MGYP, 2008).

Some analysts have expressed caution about the potential for such projects, particularly for young people from divided communities. One project associated with urban regeneration aimed to use expression through the arts to promote social inclusion, the ability for self-reflection and the sense of personal agency. The arts activities were a way of allowing the young people involved to express local identities and to make bridges between young people from two different disadvantaged communities (in Manchester and Halifax). However, the projects' success was limited – for example the girls involved in exchange visits used the occasion to reinforce the divisions between them; using hostile chanting at the other group to reinforce in-group identity and territorialism. Girls who were articulate in the setting of their own youth centres were monosyllabic or silent in the context of project activities (Poursanidou and Farrier, 2008).

The young mothers in Reevy Hill, living in a poor area, had bad experiences of being unable to communicate individually with those in authority, and resented not being heard. For example, one young woman spoke about the difficulty of getting help when she had ongoing trouble with a neighbour, observing that her inability to get an effective response from the police and the council may be partly about the way she expresses herself:

"I think sometimes when you are on the phone.... lots of times you are quite cross about something, and you are quite fired up about it and something has upset you, you come across as quite rough, and you tend to get more out of them if you do it properly and calmly and it's really hard to do that."

These young women also had little belief that a collective expression of needs would achieve anything for them and were wary of people who sounded too articulate, as this had a distancing effect.

Dialogue

If citizenship is learnt in practice, then the exercise of voice can be seen as a form of informal learning; creating and practising social capital, and creating reciprocal relations in dialogue – reaching out and empathising with others. Dialogue can be conceptualised as a reciprocal relationship, a conversation between two or more parties. This report is concerned with three domains of dialogue: conversations within families and between friends, dialogues between groups of young people of different backgrounds, and dialogues between young people and powerful adult decision-makers.

We outlined earlier in the report how family background, relationships with significant family members and with peers, schools and neighbourhood are crucial to how an individual acts in public fora. However, there are few studies that focus on the interplay of these factors within informal settings; although one study, for example, shows a very strong correlation between ability to discuss important issues with a father and children's well-being (Quilgars et al, 2007)

It is also important to focus on dialogues between groups of young people. Here, there are obvious connections with the social cohesion debates, and therefore the importance of dialogue across all social categories must be stressed. These categories include those who have different levels of income, those who inhabit different geographical spaces, differences of gender, ethnicity, health and migrants. Thus, bridging social capital created through association becomes central to cohesion initiatives. This is recognised by the young representatives in BKYP. One comments:

"...so I got involved with BKYP and I wanted to do things in Bradford, and not just in my own little community – but in the wider community. And that's what it was that made me get involved."

There is a perceived need amongst those who work with young people to build bridging and linking forms of association across social identities.

In Kirklees local authority, a project adopts a variety of models of expression including a 'Speakers Corner' approach to open expression and creative dialogue between different groups of young people and practitioners, an initiative which links the expression of voice, struggle to be heard and dialogue with positive aspects of creating cohesion and understanding between and within different communities (Young People, Expression and Cohesion, 2008). Here, the emphasis on the concept of 'conversation' is used to link processes of expression and dialogue.

Dialogue needs to occur between children and young people and adults who have power over their lives. It is this process of 'linking' that has formed the bulk of attention by government, academics, practitioners and policy-makers. Interest covers children and young people's participation in service delivery, how local government decisions are made and how they can shape children and young people's advocacy groups. The wider literature looks at the success and failures of these processes, some of which focuses on the effectiveness of the dialogues that occur. As one interviewee states:

"Disabled children and young people have become skilled presenters. They have spoken to policy-makers and made their needs known. However, they need to see change, because what hasn't happened for them is the change in their situation regarding friends and a social life, education and money. If none of that changes for them, then what is the point?"

Young people in the Youth Parliament also recognised the need to know how to talk to people like councillors and politicians and felt that the experience of the Youth Parliament equipped them for this. Such skills were not gained overnight – the young people's accounts suggest the evolution of their expression of voice through different modes over time. One member of the BKYP talks of his experience of learning through dialogue – he first approached the Youth Parliament work as a way of expressing his own views on politics but:

"...it has become something much more – where I learn, I am interactive, and I have changed as a person because of it".

A young woman added:

"Well when I joined I didn't really know a lot about how to voice my opinions and stuff like that and I learned and I learned that there are different ways of approaching a situation. There are ways of being councillors and meeting with some really influential people. I think it has been a really useful experience."

This section ends on a cautionary note, recognising the severe limitations on the effective exercise of voice by marginalised young people. Related to the expression of voice and the struggle to be heard is the type of forum in which voice is being exercised. There is a distinction between 'invited' and 'created' spaces and relations of power permeate any space for public expression and engagement (Cornwall and Schatten, 2007). Public expression, like citizenship, is learnt through repeated practice and attention needs to be paid to the (potentially exclusionary) procedures and norms for discussion and decision-making in such spaces (Cornwall and Schatten, 2007). Experience of using public spaces to encourage expression, articulation of needs and dialogue also demonstrates that muteness and silence may be used as a 'weapon of the weak' in circumstances where the articulate or powerful dominate. Social inequalities may well be transferred into new arenas, affecting the ways in which voice is exercised. Experience of spaces designed to facilitate the expression of voice by a variety of stakeholders suggests that, for example, relatively unimportant 'consensus' issues may be brought to the foreground and the contentious issues which follow the faultlines of social division under-emphasised or 'backgrounded'. Williams (2005) cautions that children are most likely to influence decision-making at a local level – where they are least likely to affect societal power relations or policy. A key issue, therefore, is scaling up the expression of voice and processes of dialogue.

This brief consideration of some of the possible outcomes of association well illustrates the complexity of processes involved in generating young people's well-being and young people's struggle to find 'voice'. Processes of association in specific places may both enable and constrain their wider engagement in society and the impact of voice. Outcomes (say, for 'feeling good' or relatedness and social inclusion) may be different for different children depending on their background and circumstances and the context. In the next chapter, the report draws on the 'resources' element of the framework to consider the wider patterning of society which shapes processes, mechanisms and outcomes of association.

4

How societal resources shape association

In the conceptual framework outlined in chapter two, the general patterns and structures of society shape mechanisms of association into particular context-specific forms. This chapter concentrates on how they shape association in exclusionary ways.

Civil society association and social exclusion

A concern with social exclusion includes generic poverty issues, but also those of ethnicity, gender and (dis)ability amongst others. These issues are usually closely inter-related; for instance, national statistics show that 86% of children in Pakistani/Bangladeshi households in the UK were in the bottom 40% of households ranked by disposable income compared with 49% of all children of households, and 18% of boys in households with a gross weekly income of less than £100 per week had a mental disorder (National Statistics, 2007). Furthermore, this has an impact on association and formal participation, with those from families earning more than £75,000 per year being twice as likely to volunteer (volunteering is explored further in chapter five) as those from families earning less than £10,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2004). Poverty and other forms of social exclusion have been associated with lower levels of trust and people feeling that they cannot influence decisions and have a weaker sense of “collective efficacy” (Kitchen et al, 2006). Poorer people spend more time and energy simply trying to secure adequate services and striving for a comfortable standard of living.

Some estimates calculate that the lives of 3.8 million children in the UK – one in three – are blighted by poverty (Sharma, 2007). One recent study has found that, although 600,000 children have been raised out of poverty since 1997, these are children from families without work. There remains 1.4 million children from working poor households who remain trapped in poverty (Cooke and Lawton, 2008). Furthermore, in June of 2008, the rate of child poverty in the UK had risen for the second year running. Jonathan Bradshaw’s work on poverty in the ‘EU15’ found the UK record of child poverty hovering around the bottom. The UK has the highest proportion of children in lone-parent families who are not in employment; the highest proportion of children living in workless families; the third highest child poverty risk and the highest movement into and out of poverty (Bradshaw, 2006). The issue of poverty and social exclusion is especially pertinent to children and young people who are asylum seekers, as they often have to live in damp and unsafe housing, and suffer racial abuse and problems accessing education (Barnardos, 2008).

Definite figures on social identity and association are hard to come by, since studies have produced contradictory findings. For example, most data collected on volunteering notes that girls and women are more likely to be involved than boys and men. However, different studies in Ireland showed contradictory evidence of the predominance of women’s and men’s participation (European Volunteer Centre, 2004; Donaghue, 2006). Concrete figures are hard to generate without an agreed definition. Many academic studies (Anderson et al, 2006) have shown that national rates of association are primarily determined by the involvement of women, thus, issues around childcare and paid employment are key in understanding rates of associating.

Barriers to formal association

There are a number of barriers to children and young people’s association reflecting inequalities in society, the particular focus of projects or policy initiatives, the exigencies of everyday life and the lack of perceived links between involvement and beneficial outcomes. Many attempts at engaging with children and young people are top-down initiatives, concerned with children and young people as ‘citizens in waiting’, rather than with their activities in the here and now. Top-down approaches are normally met with a lack of enthusiasm by young people themselves, yet the blame remains with young people for failing to take advantage of opportunities.

One of the primary forms of exclusion from children and young people's association is based around broader patterns of social exclusion, such as poverty, unemployment, literacy problems, language barriers and disabilities. The Institute for Volunteering Research noted that BME groups and disabled people were put off volunteering for the following reasons:

- BME people undertook more informal volunteering;
- disabled people rejected 'traditional' models of volunteering based on the 'helper and helped' power relationship;
- perceived or anticipated prejudices of other staff, other volunteers or service users;
- over-formal recruitment selection procedures that alienated those whose first language was not English, people with visual impairments and those with low levels of literacy;
- physically inaccessible environments for those with mobility-related impairments;
- failure of organisations to fully reimburse expenses (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2007).

Time is a significant factor shaping all association. For young people, the intense pressure to succeed academically results in a shortage of time available to them.

Negative peer pressure (not looking 'cool') and lack of confidence (especially amongst disaffected groups) also serve as barriers to young people volunteering in formal organisations. Work with young people for the Irish Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) described formal organisations as: 'off-putting' and 'old-fashioned' with boring, poorly-organised and circular meetings, little action and reliance on old ways of communicating. This was related to the old faces and cliques controlling them who were "involved in everything in an area" making it difficult for "others to feel they can get involved" (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2006, p17).

Furthermore, children's time is increasingly structured with after-school activities that are adult-led. The growing degree of stress and pressure on children and young people today, generated by societal trends beyond their immediate control, is increasingly recognised. One recent study of seven to 11 year-olds in the UK, for instance, identified that:

"...children are under intense and perhaps excessive pressure from policy-driven demands of their schools and commercially-driven values of the wider society; that family life and community are breaking down; that there is a pervasive loss of respect and empathy both within and between generations; that life outside the school gates is increasingly insecure and dangerous; that the wider world is changing, rapidly and in ways which it is not easy to comprehend though on balance they give cause for alarm, especially in respect of climate change and environmental sustainability; that the primary school curriculum is too narrow and rigid; that the curriculum and children's educational careers are being compromised by the national tests, especially the Key Stage 2 SATs." (Primary Review, 2007, p1-2)

This leaves less time for children and young people to meet up and structure their own free time away from adult surveillance. Even the 'super-participants' of the BKYP commented on the effort involved in organising their time and balancing schoolwork with other activities. Prominent in their accounts was the need to spend unstructured time also with family and friends.

Research by the OMC in the Republic of Ireland (National Children's Advisory Committee, 2006), shows that lack of information and awareness of opportunities is a major reason why young people do not get involved. Furthermore, young people feel that they do not have a space where they can meet up and come together, hold events or 'hang out' together. This is exacerbated by poor or privatised housing developments that are 'developer-led' and lacking community facilities. Our research notes the importance of locality to the young people, as they have less access to transport and often don't feel safe beyond their immediate locality.

Research into the views of children and young people testifies to the disaffection with public processes, a lack of accountability by public bodies and a democratic deficit (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2006, p15), especially at a local level. This is evidenced by academic research which finds that young people are pessimistic about being listened to by adults (Marsh et al, 2007).

Successful re-engagement with disaffected people should involve new and interesting activities and work to increase young people's confidence. Successful engagement also involves giving young people advice, information, guidance, support with school work and accredited activities and training (Bailey, 2006).

Citizens are "made, not born", but education provision is arguably geared more to the production of workers than citizens. Citizenship education is too little and too late in Ireland (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, p25) and, as the research finds, in the UK (see section 6.4 below).

Cahill and Hart have observed that children and young people are segregated from adults and thus spend little time with adults who are not their parents or carers in informal settings. This gives rise to suspicion on both sides when they do meet and many communities are characterised by a series of confrontations between young people and adults over public spaces. This separation of adult and child worlds was picked up in the interviews. The 'different worlds' of children involves other issues about how to capture children and young people's perspectives and feed them into policy. Helen Seaford, then of The Children's Society, explains:

"The difference between the different worlds is the timescale. The children and young people are living in the present, shifting between different cultures and time horizons as they grow. The trick is how to feed their messages and expectations on to those who have the power to make change."

(quoted in The Children's Society, 2002, p 8)

Association, participation and space

The importance of location and space, from the macro to the micro-level in shaping association and participation in society has been acknowledged from a variety of sources. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), for instance, argues that:

"...place matters and that all localities have unique qualities. This does not mean that a one size fits all range of solutions cannot be prescribed from a national level. It also means that a new social contract between citizen and government needs to be developed at local, regional and national levels. The challenges facing different areas and therefore the solutions will be influenced by a range of factors including: history of migration and settlement, levels of poverty and wealth, de-industrialisation and the current population profile. We strongly believe in tailored and bespoke local activity to build integration and cohesion."

Hickey and Mohan (2004) have noted the growing importance of the spatial in political theory, and space was found to be an important element in our research. There are three ways in which spaces are an important component of analysis. Firstly, often in policies and practice, spaces are romanticised and homogenised through self-evident evocations of 'the local community'. In fact, local communities are complicated social worlds where social identities are shaped by local dynamics, constructions of space/place, and by wider social forces. Children and young people can be silenced by these constructions of the local community and often local young people are seen as problems by the 'voice' of local communities.

Secondly, places, and the perceptions of them, are shaped by market forces and material well-being. For instance, the Delph Hill district was relatively poorer than surrounding areas and those areas understood the poverty in the area negatively. However, even the Delph Hill area must not be understood as homogeneously poor but consisted of a complex series of relationships which drew distinctions between people.

Finally, it is important to consider how participatory or associational spaces are presented. For instance, 'provided' spaces, such as council meetings, are often disempowering to local people. Those subject to discrimination and exclusion can find them intimidating. How they talk and what they talk about may be seen as incoherent, irrelevant or even disruptive.

These are in contrast with 'claimed' spaces where association occurs in a more organic way. As we will see, this has ramifications for the young people of Delph Hill and the young mothers in Reevy Hill who feel distant from local authorities and services, yet feel comfortable with those who come from within their own

communities. Marian Barnes has described how young people were coached by youth workers to present versions of their concerns that were seen to be 'acceptable', rather than expressing them in their own language (Barnes, 2007). The ownership of these spaces is a crucial element in our analysis.

There is an underlying belief in the assumption that children and young people will be willing and able to share their wishes, beliefs and views with bureaucrats if they are offered specific structures and spaces to do this. However, it is important to consider those spaces and ask whose views are defining them. As Cornwall and Schattan (2007, p 9) have pointed out, these spaces need to include "involvement by a wide spectrum of ... committed bureaucrats, and inclusive institutional designs that address exclusionary practices and embedded bias."

In summary, this chapter has looked at how formal associational structures can exclude and discourage the involvement of children and young people, especially those young people from socially-excluded backgrounds. It has illustrated the need to pay attention to the context (both physical and social) and place of associations and how these might shape outcomes. This report agrees with Edwards and Davis (2004) that participation needs to be rooted in the lived lives (and spaces) of children and young people on tangible issues of concern and importance to them. Furthermore, participation needs to be inclusive, involving opportunities for the young to engage on their own terms and not just through adult-initiated or established models and processes.

5

Social capital and associational mechanisms

One of the primary findings of this research is that most thinking to date on children's associations has focussed on the formal elements of association to the detriment of the wide spectrum of vibrant informal association. The aim here is to balance this by sketching out the importance of such forms of association to children and young people.

Young people's association

The thinking about association in terms of bonding, bridging and linking relationships and processes outlined in chapter two provides a rough typology of children and young people's association which balances the excessive focus on formal mechanisms for association. This chapter looks at the processes and mechanisms of children and young people's association by:

- reviewing the literature on formal volunteering, then broadening the scope of the inquiry to less formal association, looking at bonding relationships and how these also contribute to young people's sense of well-being and social identity;
- looking briefly at new forms of association through information and communication technologies (ICTs), although it should be noted that ICTs may tend to reinforce bonded forms of association, at the expense of linking forms of relationships;
- reviewing the arenas for public participation and deliberation established for children and young people. It is argued that, while these structures work for a few young people, they tend to be exclusive and do not encourage participation for all young people;
- discussing how the education system equips children and young people for association and how it might assist them to develop their social capital in all its forms;
- discussing the linking of adults' and children's associational life.

Volunteering: formal and informal – the full picture

Available literature tends to focus on the formal elements of association, in particular on volunteering. Volunteering has many benefits to children and young people, not least in the way it increases young people's social capital and improves their sense of citizenship and social identity (Hall, 1999). This was certainly the case in the BKYP, with many of the members being active in other groups, in churches, in leisure activities and at school or college. However, it is suggested here that formal volunteering forms only part of young people's sense of citizenship. The literature also varies in the degree to which it presents young people as alienated, apathetic or engaged in volunteering and campaigning in specific social spaces (Roker and Player, 2000). One recent piece of academic research found over a thousand youth groups dedicated to some form of 'social action', including youth wings of larger organisations, youth councils, campaigning, community-based and support groups (Roker, 2002). Research carried out for this report found 30,031 organisations interested in children and 13,691 for young people listed in Guidestar. However, this still did not include children's own informal groups and Roker, as was the case here, found it impossible to clarify which were youth-led, youth-managed or youth-involved projects. Indeed, some organisations believed themselves to 'involve' children and young people by providing services and giving them questionnaires to fill in! It is important to also note that many projects are short term, close to collapse or have been superseded by other projects.

The broader literature reflects the interests of government, policy-makers, academics, formal charities and voluntary associations, and figures are highly eclectic and inconsistently defined. There are varying definitions by organisations on where children become young people or when young people become adults. Furthermore, any statistics collected are more likely to be skewed towards white, higher social class groups.

Indeed, a recent paper by the European Volunteer Centre notes: “the lack of quality evidence on volunteering, the failure to adopt consistent definitions” (2004, p16).

In both the UK and Republic of Ireland, there was concern in the 1990s about the relatively low level of volunteering by younger people, compared with middle-aged groups. The CSV, for instance, suggest: “The group least likely to volunteer were 18-24 year olds. Nearly three-quarters (73%) said they didn’t have time to volunteer and nearly half (46%) said they were not interested” (Great British Time Survey, 2005). However, when we look at research into young people’s volunteering we see quite an active and lively field, especially when compared with mainland Europe (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003). This may be due to recent government policies such as the UK compact relations between the government and voluntary sector in 1998, which has produced the young people-focused Millennium Volunteers and Student Volunteering. Reviews of these programmes indicate a rise in the proportion of young people volunteering (European Volunteering Centre, 2004). In the Republic of Ireland, the government established the National Council of Volunteering (NCV) in 2000, and the Taskforce on Active Citizenship has identified rising levels of volunteering despite some important barriers (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002).

In contrast to some assumptions about young people there are strong levels of interest in volunteering from those under 35 (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2006). The enthusiasm of young people compared with other age categories is reinforced by other studies. The Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS, 2003) found the rate of young people’s community participation, including civic participation, formal and informal volunteering rising from 18.8 million in the UK in 2001 to 20.3 million two years later. Furthermore, young people aged between 16 and 24 were more likely to be engaged in informal volunteering than any other age group. It is important to recognise, therefore, the ‘hidden’ aspect of young people’s involvement.

This is the crucial point of this report – children and young people’s associations are often not in the public or formal sphere but are hidden and therefore overlooked. Informal volunteering may also explain the over-emphasis on white, middle-class volunteering in formal organisations, poorer people, those from ethnic minorities, in addition to children and young people are perhaps more likely to be involved in informal volunteering with families, friends and networks.

Some studies have been initiated in the context of the Russell Commission in the UK. One such report by Price Waterhouse Coopers (2006), on behalf of the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES), focuses on the market for the provision of “positive activities” for young people (aged 13-19) in England. Positive activities include structured activities such as sports and physical activities, attending clubs and societies and volunteering activities. This will normally involve practitioners or peer-leaders who engage with young people on a one-to-one or group basis. Structured activities can be any of taster sessions, residential events, or long-term regular activities. The report also looks at unstructured activities that young people engage in during their own leisure time. These are usually initiated by young people with little or no adult involvement. It is on these unstructured activities that we would urge a greater focus.

The emphasis of the Price Waterhouse Coopers report is on the impacts of structured activities that “enable young people to voluntarily participate in, or initiate, planned and purposeful activity that holds clear health, learning or social and personal development aims”. These benefits are something that other research projects emphasise. Interestingly, the young mothers in our research, when asked what positive association they remember most vividly from when they were young, cited structured activities, such as organised day-trips and holidays or other locally-organised events at schools or youth centres. As one said:

“I used to do all sorts down there and it was fun! I used to meet all sorts of people there ... We used to go there in the holidays.” (Aside from another respondent: “Baton Twirling!”) “I remember that we once won a competition and people came out to choose and one person from each group got in and that was really good.”

Most academic evidence, the evidence in this research, and the experience of other providers testify that involvement in structured activities, such as volunteering, does increase young people's self-confidence and self-esteem, develops a range of communication skills and improves their ability to work with other people. It also encourages further involvement in other forms of learning and training. However, as the National Youth Agency (2007) have pointed out, this development of personal and social skills is rarely reflected upon and or exploited by organisations and policy-makers. But the rewards of volunteering, in the shape of improving their CVs and developing their future careers, are recognised by young people themselves (National Youth Agency, 2007).

Family, friends and bonding relationships

We see the need to redress the excessive focus on formal institutional mechanisms for participation and to understand how these relate to 'bonding' forms of association and social capital. Researchers and practitioners are beginning to realise the importance of 'the informal sector', of peers, parents, friends and less-formal networks. For instance, Yuen et al (2005) note the importance of leisure activities in providing a foundation for the development of shared meanings, a form of social learning that leads to the emergence of social capital. Allender et al (2006) have made similar points about engagement in sport. Helen Haste and Amy Hogan (2006) have helpfully extended the analytic focus of civic engagement from the narrow confines of voting (and, one can add, formal volunteering and associations) to include helping (in a broad sense) and struggling to make one's voice heard. Thus, this section on children's association takes a broad view of associating to include peers, friends and families. In other words, a reappraisal of bonding forms of social capital is necessary, because, as Morrow (1999) noted, children's associations are usually too narrowly defined. Furthermore, the opportunities and chances to associate are shaped by age and life-event factors. For example, the young mothers in Reeve Hill are limited to family networks due to their small children, yet this does not stop them helping people and engaging in crucial forms of association.

The role of families in children's association is often forgotten. However, it is vital to work with families as children and young people have dual lives in public and private. Furthermore, family connections can be built upon to bring children and young people into projects, but this must not be done in a way that reinforces the status quo (see Bailey and Jones, 2006).

In our findings, we note the importance of family in a number of ways: first, whether or not children and young people receive family support can be crucial to the ways in which they associate; second, family members serve as role models for young people, especially mothers (see also NfpSynergy, 2007); third, families form a crucial role in shaping children's identity; and finally, refugee children are often the means through which their families are mediated in society and vice versa, and children serve as interpreters of wider society.

Young carers find the opportunities to associate very limited, given the enormous pressure of time and energy on their caring roles. Often these caring duties remain unnoticed by teachers (see Barnardos, 2006). However, we can re-evaluate their activities as providing an important social function.

Peer networks: bonding, belonging, bullying

Young people are spending an increasing amount of time with peers, rather than with families (Dixon et al, 2006). It is therefore important to focus on this aspect of their lives. All the research shows that friendships are crucial to children's well-being and rejection by other children can lead to depression, aggression and anti-social behaviour (The Children's Society, 2007). The UK government recognises how thinking and learning are inhibited by stress, anger and unhappiness, while feeling secure and valued promotes learning (HM Treasury, 2007). Young people themselves cite relationships with their peers as one of the most important aspects of their lives, especially when they go wrong, such as in the case of bullying.

The question is of growing urgency, as some research notes that children are, in comparison to the 1980s, increasingly reporting that they have no best friends (The Children's Society, 2007). Policy needs to focus on supporting children and young people's peer networks. Learning the habits and norms of association may take place within peer groups and this also shapes future associations. Young people in the BKYP would often say how the group works as friends and, some became interested in joining in the first place through friends. Friendship networks within the formal associational framework of the BKYP involved mutual support and socialisation.

'Gangs': the dark side of association?

There is a current media preoccupation with gangs, however, this preoccupation deflects attention from the more widespread problem of group crime generally. The negative coverage also tends to taint all groups of young people, especially young men, as being threatening. Of course, some gangs in inner city areas are connected with crimes, yet the extent to which they are organised is debatable. One recent report (Young et al, 2007) looked at young people involved in gangs and argued that, while most youth offending is group-related, the idea of a structured organisation is only relevant to adult criminal gangs. It suggests that criminal gangs are more likely to involve young adults rather than those below 18 covered by the youth justice system, although it concedes that developing versions of these gangs may exist.

However, most groups of young people or gangs are not involved in criminal activity and furthermore, can form an important part of children and young people's association. Nancy Rosenblum (1998), in her discussion of civil society, argued that it is necessary to include groups that commentators on civil society leave out. She includes not only identity-based groups, but also street gangs, and points out that, within this form of association, young people learn other associational skills such as taking turns in talking, reciprocity and responsibilities.

'Gang' is a concept that is very hard to accurately define. Robert Garot's (2007) work has shown just how fluid and context-specific the phenomenon of young people's gangs can be. He similarly shows how central they can be to some young people's identity, again reinforcing the view that such groups are worthy of consideration as associational groupings. The connection of gangs with identities is reinforced through other research, for instance, Les Back (2005) showed the connections between social identities and local spaces. For young people, the spaces gangs would identify with were those where participants felt safe. Like Garot, Back notes the fluidity in gang membership where 'black gangs' also comprised of a few women and white men. Thus, caution must be used in applying homogenous labels. Social responses towards gangs tend to be based upon stereotypes and fears. Alexander (2000) shows how "the rise and rise of the 'Asian gang'" was presented as a "moral panic" based around essentialised notions of race and gender.

Crucial work on gangs by John Pitts (2007) notes the complexities involved in looking at gangs. Specifically, definitions can range from young people who are part of youth movements (eg punk rockers or Goths) to criminal business organisations. Thus, there is flexibility in the term but most negative associations of gangs are associated with the heavy end. This belittles the associative value of most groups or gangs of young people which may be better defined as groups of young male friends on the street rather than organised criminal units. Pitts notes, however, the form of bonding in the gangs he researched exhibits some of the limitations of the 'bonded' type of social capital, being based on fixed relationships and localised membership.

Despite the difficulties of definition and the complex make-up of gangs, they form an important part of many young people's lives and are an interesting example of the way both 'good' and 'bad' social capital can be generated through association. They are good in that they provide a sense of identity, support, friendship and a relatively informal nexus in which young people can negotiate social spaces and places. However, they can be limiting by being too closely connected to localities, rather than 'bridging' with other groups of young people. Furthermore, large groups of young people are seen as threatening by more powerful adults and can reduce the linkages with police, service providers or adult 'community representatives'.

Sports

Sports clubs may also be means of generating social capital through association. Putnam and Coleman, in their classic accounts, refer to the importance of adult sports clubs in providing opportunities for associational 'bridging' between people of different social identities. Rarely are children's sports given an equivalent level of attention. Young people as a group up to the age of 19 are the group most likely to engage in some sport (National Statistics Office, 2004, p7). This enables them to gain experience of associations, place and cooperation. Sport also relies heavily on volunteers and is an important element in sustaining formal social associations and social capital (Sport England, 2004). One caution that needs to be made is that engagement with sport does not necessarily provide space for dialogue about wider matters.

Access to sporting facilities is also shaped by wider social inequalities. For instance, and in contrast to expectations, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Indian, Black Caribbean and Black African were less likely to have engaged in at least one sporting activity. This was particularly striking for Pakistani/Bangladeshi young people (National Statistics Office, 2004, p10). In addition, participation in sport was less likely if you were female or disabled and was less likely the lower your familial income.

New forms of association: information and communication technologies

Much is claimed for the benefits to association of information and communication technologies (ICTs), but it is impossible to do justice to this thinking in such a short study. The effects of telephones, mobiles and the internet on the way children associate both quantitatively and qualitatively are profound and have been begun to be studied elsewhere (Livingstone and Bober, 2005; Livingstone and Drotner, 2008).

The effects of ICTs include the possibility of creating bridging and linking forms of social capital and lowering barriers to association and political action. These technologies have allowed young people to become activists and campaigners for change at a local, national and international level. Associations formed out of these technologies are characterised by fluidity, they have informal structures and procedures and can create and coordinate dialogue and communication between people. New technologies have facilitated new "communities of interest" (Cockburn, 2005) around shared interests and have lifted association beyond localities. The internet was also a successful recruiter of children and young people. One study of recruitment of volunteers from the internet found that 63% of them had never volunteered before and approximately a third were those aged between 16 and 25 (Volunteer Centres Ireland, 2006). Yet these projects must be supported by good 'real world' management. Results from a children's IT project in Ireland (Brady, 2007) identified the need for good participatory work to be intertwined with good reflective professional practice and project management.

However, the growth of the internet makes it far easier for people to find others with the same interests. Sunstein (2007) has pointed out the dangers of niches becoming "echo chambers" in which only the views of like-minded people are heard and the internet makes it easy for people to filter information into a personalised selection. Sunstein argues that a healthy democratic society requires people to be exposed to a number of diverse and unexpected opinions they would rather avoid. This resonates with social capital thinking which emphasises the importance of bridging forms of association which help to generate expectations of trust between people of different social identities.

The issue of the technological divide is especially pertinent to children and young people. One study noted that around half (49%) of those aged between 8 and 11 owned their own mobile phone, compared with 82% of those children aged from 12 to 15 (National Statistics Office, 2007).

Arenas for public deliberation and participation

There has been a huge growth in the number of youth councils, youth forums, scrutiny commissions, youth boards and many more activities involving young people at a local, national and international level. Many of these initiatives have failed to promote a style of leadership that is open to, and informed by, young people. Reasons for this include the tendency of adults in organisations to wish not to relinquish power and their inability to facilitate young people's voices. However, feeling comfortable with formality, from our conversations with the young people of Bradford and Keighley Youth Parliament, depends upon:

- a young person's educational background;
- a young person having a wide social network;
- the encouragement of parents/carers;
- adequate support from professionals;
- the development of positive learning of how to participate and enjoy those structures;
- a lack of bad experiences of previous associations.

Public participation and well-being

Well-being is linked to the exercise of some sort of control over one's own life. Participatory approaches are frequently advocated as facilitating this and increasing young people's involvement in deliberative democracy and policy-making. For engagement in politics, King (2007) suggests:

- publication of youth manifestos by election candidates aimed at young people, to be distributed to schools and youth groups;
- lowering the voting age to 16;
- strengthening youth mayors, school councils, local youth funds and youth parliaments;
- budgets for youth mayors;
- new laws requiring local and national government to consult young people.

However, there is considerable debate about the well-being effects of such processes, particularly as the requirement of participation and the structures through which it is solicited are often imbued with inequalities.

There are a number of debated themes in children's participation in public deliberation including the role of adults, the struggle to find appropriate forms of participation and to develop meaningful practice, problems of theory, and implementation and discourse on children and young people's citizenship (Crimmens and West, 2004). The PHF/Carnegie UK Trust work (Pitcher, 2007, p 33) identified the following aspects of civil society associations that were important to them; they:

- are independent from the state and family;
- offer support to young people without judging them;
- give practical help;
- listen to young people and care about their views;
- help to give young people a voice;
- enable participants to make friends, as well as to learn;
- offer a safe environment for young people.

This report recognises, along with Pinkney (2006), that children may need help through participatory practice in developing their social and cultural capital. The young people involved in the BKYP needed support, as they were involved in a number of activities throughout the district.

Other research raises significant questions about the extent to which participation in the structures of deliberative democracy promotes inclusion/well-being. These questions include how to bridge the gap between children's interest in local issues and wider political debates, from which they feel distanced, with older children showing most cynicism about politicians and active citizenship (Buckingham, 2000). How should children/young people enter into relations with the state? A study of youth parliaments explores how far young people adopt the accepted norms of representative democracy (for symbolic/legitimacy/efficacy reasons), and how far they challenge these in order to bring to the fore youth priorities and agendas (O'Toole and Gale, 2006). The language and practices of politics and policy-making may be alienating for children, and yet children's preferred ways of expressing opinions need to be better understood and translated for policy processes. Such understanding is important as partial or poorly-executed attempts to foster participation can have strong negative effects on well-being, leading to disaffection, social exclusion and choices made by the young people which compound their disadvantage (Matthews, 2003). Some emphasise the need for greater reciprocity in participatory policy-making projects with children (Thi Lan and Jones, 2005).

Children and representational structures

Research shows that participation in public and formal decision-making needs to be entwined with children and young people's everyday lives and personal and family decision-making (Hill et al, 2004). This has significant implications for establishing and embedding ongoing relationships, through which adults and organisations relate to children, rather than simply focussing on one-off participatory events or isolated structures (Sinclair, 2004). Tisdall and Davis (2004) ask whether adult-led promotional groups are more effective than representational groups of children, as they have more political skills and are less likely to be dismissed as unrepresentative by policy-makers. Additionally, there is a perceived need for adults in organisations to be more competent in engaging with children and their participation. From the literature, a number of problems with representative democracy have been noted:

Firstly, once someone becomes a representative, there is not necessarily any explicit means of accountability and feedback to those represented, the voice becomes an individual opinion (Cairns, 2006). The young people in Delph Hill had no idea of who their local council representatives were, and neither did they care. Interestingly, the young mothers only knew one of their councillors by name who was connected to a local church; they offered the following story of the fate of a councillor who did not live in the community:

"Well, a councillor in my area got his money stolen a couple of weeks ago. When he was having a surgery, they barricaded him in the community centre and set fire to it."

Secondly, as Hill et al (2004) maintain, representational democracy may exacerbate divisions – investment in the training of a small group of individuals to take part in adult structures may lead to limiting the number of children and young people who feel able to take part. Participation by small groups of activists with intense commitments to some causes is combined with obstacles to routine participation by more ambivalent young people with everyday concerns. The following remark by a BKYP member illustrates this:

"For me, I think that people really think it [BKYP] is out of their reach. They think that BKYP and youth parliament is something really posh, or something that is full of white, middle-class people – well, I think someone said 'well, you are probably all snobs on there', when we are nothing like that."

Finally, representational mechanisms do not necessarily encourage involvement across the spectrum of organisations and society. Recognising the impact of many young people being involved at different levels and in various ways, implies the need for collaborative working and shared decisions (Badham and Davies, 2007). It is hardly surprising, then, that the young people in Delph Hill and Buttershaw felt separate from those representing them.

The requirement for governance reform is something that is being increasingly recognised by central and local government. In 2007, the UK government made constitutional reform a central policy issue (Ministry of Justice, 2007). The Lyons inquiry into local government found that there was a need for local government to see itself not merely as a site for service delivery but "a place of debate, discussion and collective decision-

making” (Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, 2007). This crisis in local governance is particularly acute when it comes to encouraging young people’s engagement, as less than 4% of local councillors are under 30 and local engagements with young people tend to be “one-off initiatives” (Councillors Commission, 2007). The Councillors Commission in 2007 was concerned about “the lack of faith in existing methods of participation; perceptions that local government is not interested in the views of young people ... of particular importance perhaps is the fact that young people perceive local government to be disinterested in their views. Even when young people acknowledge that there are opportunities to participate they sometimes abstain, assuming that their views will either be given little status or simply ignored” (p 81). These sentiments were reflected in the case studies. Interestingly, the Councillors Commission have fostered the involvement of young people in more deliberative and participative ‘experiments’ in democratic engagement, through a strategy which collaborated with the recent government *Aiming High* strategy (see O’Donnell et al, 2007). The *Aiming High* strategy promises the use of participatory budgeting of the Youth Opportunities and Youth Capital Funds.

Children and citizenship education

Schools and citizenship education

Bridging the gaps between inequalities in communities and between children and decision-makers needs at some stage to involve mediation, training or education. This has been attempted in part through the development of citizenship education in schools. Schools have the potential to provide a groundbreaking forum for furthering children’s participation in society. They have all children aged between 5 and 16. They can offer mechanisms such as school councils and citizenship education on the national curriculum, that can provide children with the skills to influence things around them. Work by Carnegie UK (Davies et al, 2007; see also Halsey et al, 2007) in schools has identified a number of important benefits of participation in schools:

- academic achievement was boosted;
- it made children feel better;
- children felt more in control of their learning;
- children give feedback to teachers, thereby boosting their professionalism;
- it enhanced pupils’ communication skills;
- it had an impact on specific aspects of the curriculum, such as citizenship education and extra-curricular activities;
- it boosted participants self-esteem and self-confidence;
- it facilitated better relations with the school and community;
- it improved behaviour;
- it encouraged parental participation;
- it enhanced interpersonal and political skills.

However, citizenship education as currently practised has been criticised by some writers for being ambiguous about children’s rights and undermined by the undemocratic nature of schools (Lockyer, 2003). Attitudes to school are remarkably different according to social class. Sutton et al (2007, p vii) note that for “estate children ... attitudes towards school were generally negative: school was controlling and boring; somewhere they tried to spend as little time as possible”. This has implications for citizenship education in schools, where citizenship will probably be seen as an extension of ‘more of the same’ by those from less well-off backgrounds. Schools were an important part of learning about supporting children and young people’s association. One young man notes:

"I think that what schools need to do is, instead of just focusing on the National Curriculum, focus more on citizenship ... They [young people] just need to be told about what possibilities are out there in the world. They should be informed that they can get their voices heard, instead of just concentrating on maths, science and curriculum-based activities, because school is a great way of advertising to young people. They are there every day of the week."

The young people involved in this research were critical of structures, such as School Councils, in their schooling. One states:

"It was just, like, they deal with stuff which, to me, is pretty pointless – things like the toilets and stuff, when you could be discussing funding and new resources and stuff and they are going on about what is the colour of the toilets and whatever, and I think I don't really care!"

Education today is constrained by the limited nature of democracy in schools. One interviewee notes:

"I don't mean that they have a right to knock on the headmaster's door and walk in and take a post on, but the school is enabled in law to support young people's involvement in governance while they have no statutory right to be at their own exclusion."

However, this could be contrasted with accounts from the older asylum-seeker and refugee children who positively understood citizenship education in their schools as a way of understanding what it means to be British, and as learning how best to affect decision-making in society.

Wider citizenship education

In terms of encouraging active citizenship, Holford and van der Veen (2003) have identified the only minor effects school-based citizenship education programmes have had on encouraging active citizenship among young people. Yet they have also pointed out the benefits that extra-curricular activities have had on encouraging this and close research attention needs to be paid to processes of informal learning in civil society and the process of active citizenship that such extra-curricular activities foster.

Our own research supports the view that it is important to maintain the provision of education outside school, especially that provided by the Youth Service. The young people we talked to supported the view of OFSTED who point to the educational contribution from youth work (OFSTED, 2007), especially in the field of "making a positive contribution". Other longitudinal work also points to the importance of local youth services in inhibiting social exclusion and providing a positive influence (Feinstein et al, 2006).

The young people in BKYP noted the importance of learning out of school to reduce the effects of social exclusion within schools. As a young woman involved in BKYP notes:

"What the Youth Service does offer is not having the same barriers as you would probably find in other institutions in the education system, such as racism, such as economic barriers, and teachers' understanding and labelling."

Another young woman comments:

"I think it has made a lot of people more independent, much more confident, and not at all like school. School is, like, very closed, and you are just limited in what you are going to do. When you come here, you are in a different environment, you are much more yourself, and you are independent and you are accepted as well. No-one is going to say anything against you. I don't know, really, you just don't... you just want to get on. Your aim is to achieve something. That's the good thing about volunteering, either in social services or whatever you do really. That's why I came here. I think a lot of others come here for the same reason."

A young man agrees with this:

"Finding a place, particularly as a British Pakistani, is sometimes hard. The Youth Service shows how everything comes together, it doesn't discriminate, or hold anything against anyone, and it is just making a change."

The education of young people into citizenship is also undertaken by voluntary organisations such as Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), A National Voice, and Funky Dragon, amongst many others. Youth workers in faith-based organisations – many of whom have high levels of participation from young people from BME communities – can assist in facilitating youth-led opportunities (National Youth Agency, 2005).

In short, school citizenship education is an important opportunity to improve children's association, but this also needs to be extended out of school. As the Irish Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2006, p41) argues:

"Dialogue, participation and responsibility are formed at home, at school and in the wider community. Through participation in formal education, young people need to feel part of a community working towards shared objectives and a common good, and not just merely isolated individuals pursuing their own interests."

Citizenship education in school is not the only option. First, work needs to happen before children get to school and it is necessary to provide a framework for children under five, as well as those who are older, to explore and communicate their perspective (Clark and Percy-Smith, 2006). Secondly, work by the voluntary sector and the Youth Service needs to be supported in order to ensure as many young people as possible are included. The requirement for earlier intervention by a less formal approach is noted by one of the young men in the study:

"I think that we need to get it to young people much earlier than it is now. You get it when you are twelve, thirteen and by that time, some young people are just put off by school. They don't want to be there, they don't think it is helping them. Our message is getting there, but we need to get it to them much, much earlier than we do now. Even the later years of primary school would be better. It would be because of social responsibility not because learning about it would change their lifestyle when they are older, but so that they can grow into good habits when they are older. This is the point – they are very receptive at primary school, so you need them to pick up these good habits and run with it, rather than in secondary schools, where they might just take it or leave it."

Adult-child relationships and association

Which kind of adult-child relationships lead to good outcomes for association and well-being? Analysts note (with reference to projects managed by the NYA) the time and consistent effort participation takes (especially in including hard to reach young people) and suggest the need to develop the capacity of professionals (for example, in regeneration programmes) to do this (Turner and Martin, 2004). Our research finds that children and young people's association reflects that of adults and is embedded in relationships with adults. Adult associations are shaped by processes of social exclusion, so too are children and young people's; we need to take an integrated approach, then, to understanding the linkages.

Mirroring adult structures

As was noted earlier, adult voluntary organisations have problems attracting socially-excluded groups. Adults from minority ethnic backgrounds are more comfortable with more informal organisations and the same is found with those with disabilities or those who suffer from mental health problems. It is unrealistic to expect children and young people's associations to be different, despite the huge attempts by young people to be inclusive. All the BKYP members were extremely anxious to be inclusive and actively sought the voices of young people they felt were not heard, such as those from asylum-seeking families or the poor. One comments:

"I think we all realise that we have leadership potential and we should play leadership roles, as a parent, or wherever. I think we have struck on an interesting point with regard to the fact that we all live in one world, so why are we sectioning our society off into groups? We label and brand people. We are all human beings and we need to focus and unite on commonalities."

An important problem that was raised concerned the model of representative democracy used in the UK and Ireland and how this has limitations for improving the links between children and young people; young people

and their governance; and young people with adult decision-makers, reinforcing the issues raised in chapter six. The political system has difficulty engaging ethnic minority adults and those from poorer backgrounds. It is, therefore, not surprising that mirror structures for young people have similar difficulties.

Adult association

Adult involvement, and more particularly its decline, in organisations that shape children and young people's lives is also important. This becomes increasingly apparent, the older young people get. For instance, parental involvement in primary schools (especially from mothers) occurs across the country. However, with the switch to secondary-aged education, this declines, particularly among men.

The decline of adult association has deep implications, notably in increasing the separation of the worlds of children and adults referred to in the literature review. As one of those we interviewed states:

"We know from work – what's it called? – Freedom's Orphans [Margo et al, 2006] – we know from some of the stuff they pulled together ... that the worlds of young people and adults are becoming increasingly polarised. When adults don't see young people, when media becomes much stronger about the representation of young people as negative – there are problems there."

Some of those we interviewed commented on the lack of contact between adults and young people. One of those interviewed worked with high-powered officials and young people in a project where both groups met to discuss youth services. The person we interviewed noted that while preparing the civil servants they said that they were "bloody terrified" of the young people – not of any physical harm, but that they did not know how to behave toward, and talk to, young people and feared they might get it wrong.

However, polarisation is not the only story; for refugee and asylum-seeker families, the parents may gain associational opportunities through the activities of children.

Child protection

Related to the decline in adult involvement are fears to do with child protection. A number of our interview respondents noted that the requirement for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks act as a deterrent. One of the interviewees notes child protection issues as a barrier to adults working voluntarily with children and young people. It was also noted that some would fear a "backlash from parents" should they get something wrong.

Role models

It has become a truism to say that role models are important for young people. This research suggests that over-reliance on positive role models as a solution to social exclusion conceals deeper and less comfortable explanations. Nevertheless, the young people studied often referred to mothers and other family members as adults they looked to as role models, and for support and encouragement. The following extract demonstrates this:

"I think role models comes into it a lot. Especially with the way that the media peddle certain people. I think I was completely different! I looked up to my dad, because of where he is, he is in quite a position of power and he makes decisions, and is not like these lazy people who don't bother. So I took my cue from him in that I understood, from a very young age, that if I wanted to change something, I shouldn't just let it go, I should get up and try my way and make a difference."

Another agrees:

"I have got to agree about the whole subject of role models. I have always had my mum who has always been a big role model for me because she was really hard-working. My mum has actually got three professions! She's actually a lawyer, a teacher and a reflexologist!"

Yes! She's a single parent. So I have always had my mum and my foster sister who has done extremely well – she's an extremely successful Crown prosecutor now, but I have always really looked up to people like that. From a young age I went to stage school and kind of got confidence from that, and my mum is pretty much a feminist."

Interviewer: "What do you mean by pretty much a feminist?"

"Well, if there is anything on Radio 4 she has got an opinion on it! At the breakfast table it's like 'He doesn't know what he's talking about! – blah-di-blah – I should be this – let me run the country!' Stuff like that. It's just made me have something to say."

In this study, young people with wider circles of association cite more role models than the more excluded who restricted their answers to one or two strong family members, usually their mother. For instance, the BKYP group referred to people such as entrepreneurs Bill Gates, Alan Sugar and Richard Branson, as well as political activists such as Angela Davis.

Adults learning from children

We would not wish to support the view that learning is one way. Children and young people hold knowledge unavailable to adults. The most obvious point here is that they know more of their localities and the associations of their peers than any academic or politician would. Furthermore, in the refugee and asylum-seeker group, it was obvious that children are often far more engaged with British culture and society than their parents and may act as interpreters of the social and institutional world for their parents.

One of the activists we talked to also recognised children and young people's knowledge:

"I think that one of the things that really, really comes through, whenever I talk to young people is that, a lot of the time, they actually know a damn sight more than the adults! Particularly when it is around environmental stuff. They do know quite a lot about it, and when they find out more, I am always really surprised that the solutions to them seem so obvious. So for me, it is about helping to give them a voice for the stuff that they already know and the stuff that they want to achieve ... The thing that they find frustrating is not being listened to!"

This notion of (unequal) reciprocity is important given our discussion of representation and dialogue above.

6 Conclusion

This report argues that children and young people's associations must be seen in their totality. Thus, any focus on the mechanisms alone, without acknowledging the importance of the patterns of resources shaping association and the outcome of that association, will produce only a partial understanding of a highly-complex phenomenon. Instead, the mechanisms of association have been viewed as forms of social capital that are shaped by the resources available to young people. The concept of well-being has been utilised in order to further understand the outcomes of various associational arrangements and processes. In this connection, we see a complex web of interdependencies where wider societal resources shape context-specific mechanisms and these, in turn, shape outcomes for particular children and young people. The relationship is recursive – outcomes good and bad (for example, involving exercise of voice) can reshape mechanisms and even the ways in which societal resources are accessed. Children and young people's agency is entwined with all these inter-relationships. For example, experience of thwarted participation or suppression of voice may compound obstacles to further engagement, whereas positive experience of association and the attendant sense of well-being may inspire some youngsters to become 'super-participators'.

This report began with a quote from one of the interviewees, who cautioned that there is a danger that "it all becomes about the mechanism of association". Certainly, in terms of the literature, there is a plethora of commentaries about the nature, possibilities and difficulties of different mechanisms of making children and young people's voice heard. Indeed, there are countless toolkits, reports and examples available in libraries, on the internet and buried in chief executives office drawers that address issues of children and young people's participation. However, most of these focus on the immediacy of the forum (or mechanism), rather than placing it in the broader context of children and young people's association. Instead, this report argues for an understanding of children's association in more informal contexts and how this may interface with public formal structures. There is very little research on this question of how young people's experiences shape their movement into, and engagement with, more formal association.

In turn, the expression of children and young people's voices varies according to the resources, both material and non-material, that are available to them. These resources are profoundly unequal and no one mechanism can produce well-being for all children and young people. The ways in which resources shape association shift over the course of lives: the schoolchildren in this study were enabled and constrained in their social relationships and public engagement in very different ways from the young mothers. It is too simplistic to suggest that young people *choose* not to be engaged with policy and politics. The barriers and obstacles are too high and even the most resourceful young people struggle. Instead, it is necessary for those responsible for formal spaces (such as policy-makers, officials, researchers or politicians) to become more informal or to think of ways to go out to young people's own favoured spaces to listen and engage. They would probably be surprised by the creativity, imagination and intelligence they find.

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Appendix

Table 1: Key legislation and policy affecting children and young people's association

Legislation and Policy	Brief summary	What it means to children and young people's association
Law of Property Act (1925)	The Act makes void the appointment of an 'infant' (anyone who is under 18) to act as a trustee. Those over 18 can play a full, equitable and legal part in any organisation.	Although someone over 18 can play a full and equitable part in organisations, there can be practical limitations on this. such as a young person's experience. But legally clarifies young people over 18s' rights and the exclusion of those under 18.
Representation of the People Act 1928	The Act made women's voting rights equal with men, with voting possible at 21 and no property restrictions.	Suffrage rights for young women over 21.
Representation of the People Act 1969	Extension of suffrage to those over 18.	Suffrage rights for young people over 18.
House of Lords <i>Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority</i> [1985]	Brought about the concept of 'Gillick Competence' used in medical law to decide whether a child (16 years or younger) is able to consent to his or her own medical treatment, without the need for parental permission or knowledge.	A radical, symbolic and empowering decision for children under 16, where children are legally recognised as being able to arrive at decisions competently that effect their lives.
Children Act 1989	Stipulated that parental responsibilities and the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration.	The Act legally required the children's wishes and feelings to be 'taken into consideration' when arriving at decisions.
United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child 1989 (ratified in 1991 in the UK and 1992 in Republic of Ireland)	An international convention setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children.	A highly-symbolic and important convention, rallying adults and children to readily-identifiable rights. Under article 15, children have the right to meet with other children and young people and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.
Human Rights Act 1998	Made some of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK domestic law. It is unlawful for any public body to act in a way incompatible with the Convention.	Unlike the UNCRC, the Act is a legally-enforceable set of rights in the UK. ⁴ If an individual feels their rights under the ECHR has been breached, they can take the Government to court, with the final arbiter being the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The European Court has made it clear that the UNCRC is a common standard for applying the conventional rights of children. ⁵
Local Government Act 2000	Local Authorities are to promote children and young people's well-being in their social and economic environment.	The legal compulsion for local authorities to actively target services for children and young people, although the act is for all people, not just children.

⁴ See Lyon, Christina M (2007) 'Children's Rights and the UNCRC and ECHR - Interrogating the concentration on the UNCRC instead of the ECHR', *Children and Society*, 21(1), pp.221 - 229

⁵ Sahin v Germany, Chamber of Judgment of the ECHR, 8 July 2003

Learning to Listen 2001	The Government declares it's committed to designing policies and services around the needs of children and young people.	Children and young people's needs become objects of Government's attention and central to this is the need for involving children and young people in the decision-making process.
New Impetus for European Youth White Paper 2001	Adopted the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) on active citizenship for young people	It 'leads' national governments in the production of targets for participation, activities and volunteering of young people, with 'evidenced' mechanisms of including socially-excluded young people.
Laming Report 2003	The enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié led to two major reforms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the formation of the <i>Every Child Matters</i> framework • the creation of the post of a children's commissioner. 	The report prepared the ground for the Children Act 2004.
Children Act 2004	The establishment of the <i>Every Child Matters</i> framework. The establishment of the post of a children's commissioner.	These have placed children and young people at the heart of government policy (both national and local). Children's association and well-being is clearly established and there are elements of accountability and an acceptance of the possibility of children being able to work at the centre of government.
Companies Act 2006	Introduces 16 as the minimum age at which someone can become a company director, although there is some flexibility and ambiguity, in that, those under 16 can be a 'shadow director' or a 'purported director'.	Participation Works counted in 2006, 432 directors who are under 16, some of whom are under 10. Caution must be applied to these figures, as there may be double counting on the one hand, and, on the other, informal organisations sometimes act beyond the formal processes of establishing a company and thus are undercounted.
Aiming High for Children and Young People 2007	In this document, it is stated that the aim of Government is for all young people to "enjoy a range of positive experiences ... further investment to provide places to go in every community". The announcement of a Youth Citizenship Commission.	There is a promise to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> invest in training for disadvantaged young people to champion the views and needs of young people; boost Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds by a further £25 million; give young people control of 25% of youth budgets by 2018; create a National Institute of Youth Leadership.
Children's Plan 2007	In this document, the Government declared the aim of "allowing young people to hold government and local services to account for its effective delivery". Improving the quality of children and young people's associations forms an important element of improving young people's entitlements, their access to cultural and sporting opportunities and a say in decisions that affect their lives, the declared reason being to keep them "on the right track".	An important promise of delivering resources to improve the access of associational spaces for children and young people, albeit with the underlying fear of keeping young people out of trouble.

The **Carnegie UK Trust** was established in 1913. Through its programmes, the Trust seeks to address some of the changing needs of the people in the UK and Ireland, in particular those of the less powerful in society. The Trust supports independent commissions of inquiry into areas of public concern, together with funding action and research programmes. There are currently two active programmes: the **Democracy and Civil Society Programme** and the **Rural Programme**.

The **Democracy and Civil Society Programme** has two elements to its work. The main focus of the programme is the Trust's **Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland**. The second focus of the programme is the **Democracy Initiative**, which aims to strengthen democracy and increase the ability of citizens and civil society organisations to collectively influence public decision-making.

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